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POST-WARTIME VS. POST-WAR TIME:
TEMPORALITY AND TRAUMA IN *JACOB'S ROOM*, *MRS. DALLOWAY*,
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE, AND *THE YEARS*

by

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1. Introduction

Virginia Woolf's life and career were deeply informed by World War I. Her third novel, her first critically successful novel *Jacob's Room*, centers around a young man growing up in the early twentieth century. The narrator circumnavigates Jacob, never allowing full access to his thoughts and feelings, as the readers attempt to glean as much understanding of Jacob as possible from his interactions with the people around him before he leaves for the War. *Mrs. Dalloway* follows Clarissa Dalloway, a wealthy middle-aged socialite, through her day in London as she prepares for her party that evening. *To the Lighthouse* is split into three parts: a day in the life of the Ramsay family during which the son James begs to go to the lighthouse, time and weather wearing away at the Ramsay house until it is rebuilt twenty years later, and a day in which the remaining family finally sets off for the lighthouse while an artist paints a painting. *The Years* follows the Pargiter family from the 1880s to the "present day" of the mid-1930s.

In these novels, Woolf demonstrates the ways in which wartime trauma affects post-war life, from the societal trauma of losing an entire generation in *Jacob's Room*, to the continuation of wartime beyond the end of the war for traumatized soldiers and anyone whose lives they touch in *Mrs. Dalloway*, to recovery through the creation of art and family ties in *To the Lighthouse*, to the question of futurity inherent in wartime trauma in *The Years*.

Sigmund Freud describes the development of "traumatic neuroses" through two characteristics: the "factor of surprise, of fright" and "that a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule *against* the development of a neurosis" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 12). The traumatized person "cannot remember the whole of what is repressed," so he or she is "obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead

of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past” (18). Cathy Caruth emphasizes that trauma is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (*Unclaimed Experience*, 4). Caruth focuses on narrative and trauma, emphasizing that stories which convey traumatic experiences contain “a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (7). Furthermore, Caruth contends that stories about trauma can be read as a “story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (8).

2. *Jacob's Room*

In *Jacob's Room*, the focus of the narrator often wanders from Jacob, disallowing an intimate view into Jacob's character. How, then, are we to read for the trauma of the War if Jacob himself is missing entirely from the novel and the narrative excludes his death and any mention of the War itself? Alex Oxner traces Woolf's intentional removal of Jacob's interiority from the text, starting with his position as an emblem of the youth of the War (even from his last name Flanders; Oxner notes that "Outside observers, both the reader and the minor characters, frame his life with an associative device—for the reader, this device is the novel; for the other characters, it is his bedroom—just as the fallen soldiers will forever be associated with the place where they died" (Oxner, 211)). However, it is not merely that the distance between reader and protagonist allows the novel to "resonate with a larger, cultural fatality" (213); Jacob's death in the war ends the narrative. Rather than his wartime trauma being iterated within the novel, the narrative is ended by an aborted attempt to grieve for Jacob. The unknowable nature of Jacob's traumatic time at war instead reiterates the trauma of losing an entire generation for the other characters as well as the reader.

After Jacob leaves, life continues for all of the other characters until:

... the ships in the Piraeus fired their guns.

The sound spread itself flat, and then went tunneling its way with fitful explosions among the channels of the islands.

Darkness drops like a knife over Greece.

"The guns?" said Betty Flanders, half asleep, getting out of bed and going to the window, which was decorated with a fringe of dark leaves.

"Not at this distance," she thought. "It is the sea." (175)

This moment is framed as the moment when Jacob dies. The emphasis on the sound of the guns centers the attention of the reader on the presumed target, while denying even a mention of his name. The darkness dropping over Greece not only relates the location of his death but

also the symbolic loss of light, vitality, and glamor of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century infatuation with the classics that occurred among the survivors of the War. That his mother simultaneously wakes to the sound of the waves and mistakes them for guns emphasizes that the unknowable trauma in the book is not Jacob's but in fact that of those who knew him. His tragic and unexpected death is too sudden for them to comprehend fully, as demonstrated in the last page of the book, Chapter Fourteen. Bonamy and Betty are in Jacob's empty room sorting through his uncleaned room, finding pieces of his life interrupted. Bonamy suddenly breaks away to call Jacob's name out the window, as though expecting him to return. This denial and the emptiness of Jacob's room represent the repression of wartime, illustrating the trauma his family experienced. Because Jacob represented so many of the young men who were killed in the War, the trauma represented in his family is implicitly mirrored in the society within the book and the novel's contemporary readership.

Jacob's conspicuous absence is symptomatic of the novel's reticence to address the War at all. The novel itself seems to suffer from trauma at the level of narrative. Though the War is central to the narrative of *Jacob's Room*, the War is never explicitly mentioned. Even the implied grief in Chapter Fourteen is characterized by denial and cut short, with the entire chapter less than a page long. The narrative's silence on the War ends the narrative.

3. *Mrs. Dalloway*

While in *Jacob's Room* the societal trauma of losing Jacob's generation is not limited to the trauma of soldiers' battlefield experiences, *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the way in which soldiers' battlefield trauma influences post-war society.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, all characters are deeply impacted by World War I, but none more so than Septimus Warren Smith. Through Septimus, Woolf explores the psychological impact of the War on both individual and societal levels. Septimus' paradoxically superimposed experience of past and present represents the way in which his wartime trauma prevents him from continuing to interpret time in a way consistent with society. Furthermore, other characters' treatment of Septimus reveals London's collective desire to declare the War over, despite their continued experience of time being disrupted by the War.

Septimus' perception of time is intimately related to the War. When Rezia asks him the time, Septimus fixates on the word:

The word "time" split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself— (69-70)

The "riches" of the word time, presumably its complex meaning as uniquely understood by Septimus, are couched in terms of warfare such as "shells" and "shavings from a plane." Even the act of "[splitting]" its husk is violent. The references to "ode[s]" and to "Thessaly," a region in Greece including Mount Olympus and frequently featured in the classics, in relation to the dead emphasizes Septimus' disillusionment with the previously glorified classics. This disillusionment combined with the violent imagery of the word time itself reveals Septimus' aversion to the past even as he relives it and relies upon it. However, these

violent reminders of the War are complicated by “riches” and “odes,” as well as Evans’ apparent appearance, suggesting that Septimus’ time in the War has paradoxically gifted him with a curse: trauma which disrupts his experience of temporality, superimposing past onto present but also allowing Septimus a unique understanding of the way in which the War continues to affect London and the people around him.

This paradox is highlighted through Evans’ hallucinatory presence. The contradiction between Evans’ death and Septimus’ perceived interactions with the hallucination of Evans is mirrored in the statement that “There [the dead] waited till the War was over.” Given that the dead presumably refers to those soldiers who died during the War, and that the end of the War would only have meaning for those still living: that they would stop adding to the dead. The hallucination of Evans is representative of Septimus’ perception of time: impossibly both present and absent, Septimus’ past and present coexist through Evans’ hallucinatory state, reminiscent of Caruth’s “*crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*” (7). The War is and is not over, and the dead are and are not buried. Correspondingly, the living are and are not alive; the matter of time, age, and death once again calls into question the matter of older members of society living on after young men have died in wartime.

This disruption is thoroughly established as an effect of wartime trauma in a later passage:

...when Evans was killed, just before the Armistice, in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. When peace came he was in Milan, billeted in the house of an innkeeper with a courtyard, flowers in tubs, little tables in the open, daughters making hats, and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him--that he could not feel.

For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel. (86)

Evans' death "just before the Armistice" is reminiscent of the death of poet Wilfred Owen a week before the armistice, and alludes to Owen's homoerotic relationship with Siegfried Sassoon, another wartime poet (Fussell, 289-291). The timing of Evans' death establishes that death in wartime is utterly unrelated to temporality; rather, it is a paradoxically unpredictable constant, which triggers the disruption of the logical progression of time for Septimus. The irony of the timing of Evans' death is integral to Septimus' traumatic misconstruction of post-War time. He is unable to recognize "the end of a friendship," and continues to hallucinate Evans after his death. His age "under thirty" and that he seems "bound to survive" are set up both as a logical progression from one fact to another and as a pair of contradictory facts: after all, age has little to do with survival in war while it might be otherwise related. Between the irony of its timing and the unexpectedness of Evans' death, as well as their close relationship, Septimus finds Evans' horrific death unknowable, leading to his later hallucinations of Evans. After peace comes, Septimus' paradoxical perception of time once more becomes evident when past and present are combined in the statement "now that it was all over", as well as the contradiction between the War's end and Septimus' traumatic "thunder-claps of fear" which further collapse his perception of past and present.

Septimus' perception of his own relation to time passing is established as central to his character immediately in his introduction. A bystander comments on the car driving by and "Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard him" (14). Septimus' inability to "pass" physically through society is symptomatic of his relationship with time. He is simultaneously unable to pass by, on, or away; that is to say, Septimus could not continue down the street with his business, he could not move on from his trauma, and he

could not die, either during the War or since. Septimus “[finding] himself” in this state reflects a sudden awareness of his situation interrupting his experience of time passing. The structure of the sentence itself displays this psychology; his inability to pass the commenting bystander is conveyed in a dependent clause that is itself interrupting the original sentence. His interpretation of this moment is expressed through free indirect style that “Everything had come to a stand still” and “The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?” (14). That “everything had come to a stand still” represents Septimus’ view that the problem of time is not limited to his own perceptions. It is not merely other people but “everything” that is standing still, indicating that the world at large is somehow “unable to pass” this moment in history. The suspension of the movement of the metaphorical whip and the change in tense from past to present further the perception of time as universally disrupted for everyone around him on the street in London.

Any perception of universally disrupted time is rejected for the particular when Septimus thinks “It is I who am blocking the way” (15). This would at first indicate that Septimus’ perception of time as disrupted is unique to himself; however, Lucrezia also “could not help looking at the motor car,” much like many of the other passersby. While they do not similarly interpret time as suspended in this moment, the backfiring of the car is originally introduced as “—oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!” (13), reflecting the shared distortion of time that results from war trauma. This shared distortion of time reoccurs when the skywriting aeroplane flies over the busy streets of London.

All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls.

The aeroplane turned and raced and swooped exactly where it liked, swiftly, freely, like a skater— (20-21)

While the people along the Mall are all trying to discern what the aeroplane is skywriting, the clock chimes eleven times and no one is interrupted from the “pallor” and “purity” of this moment, implying that the crowd are accustomed to the dangers of planes flying overhead in wartime, but also captivated by the sight of the war machine being used for such trivial, commercial, and aesthetic purposes. Rather than the bells reminding them to go about their day, the crowd is distracted from the time by a display that embodies post-War London’s significant commercial expansion, while still utilizing tools, such as the aeroplane, made for warfare since they were plentiful and newly purposeless. Similarly, the crowd attempts to believe the fiction that the War is over by enjoying and deciphering the skywriting, while still remembering the damage which those and similar planes wreaked on London only a few years before. However, no one in the crowd can figure out what the plane is actually spelling, only that it is an advertisement for toffee. Their distorted experience of time is a result of the distraction caused by attempting to account for the simultaneous experience of wartime technology and commercial advertisement. This moment is part of a long motif of misunderstandings and incomplete or ineffective attempts at communication throughout the novel that emphasizes the inadequacy of language to convey meaning to another person.

Regardless of believed universality, Septimus’ perspective is entirely unique. When he sees the plane, free indirect style from his perspective dominates the narrative:

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signaling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks. (22)

In this moment, Septimus' delusions seem largely unrelated to warfare. His insistent belief that the plane is "signaling" him and in some way attempting to convey important information to him is likely informed by his time in the service, but he is less fixated on the message and more on the display. His awe at the beauty of the skywriting display is rapturous, largely unaware of other things in his surroundings, such as the gulls that were of such note in the previous excerpt. His belief that the skywriters "[intend] to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty," emphasizes the element of exchange: at first he would need to trade nothing, then "ever," then for only looking upon the spectacle, and he believes he would receive this display indefinitely. His disregard for time is different from that of the crowd. The crowd's distorted experience of temporality stems from distraction; Septimus' distorted experience is based in traumatic inability to bear a reality where he survived the events he did in wartime. Trauma does not merely prevent Septimus from living in an updated present but from joining history.

While Septimus' past and present are inextricable, others express the belief that "The War was over" (5). Indeed, even the belief that the War is over is immediately undermined by the word "except" ("The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven—over"). Women like Clarissa Dalloway and other passersby perceive Mrs. Foxcroft, Lady Bexborough, and Septimus as exceptions to the rule that the War is over, while Septimus perceives reality as the exception, and thus the War simultaneously is over in history but is

not over in individual experience, a perception more supported by other characters' experiences of disrupted time than Septimus' own exceptionalism.

Septimus' inability to "pass" is also perceived, by himself and by Rezia, to be an inability to pass for something he is not; he and Rezia both believe his behavior is immediately evident to all passersby as nothing other than what it is: caused by the trauma of his wartime service for their country. Rezia repeatedly thinks "People must notice" (15, 23). However, external perceptions of Septimus and Rezia only interpret them as "queer" (Maisie Johnson, 26) and "young" and "desperate" (Peter Walsh, 70). Both of these interpretations do not reflect an innate unnoticeability of Septimus' distress but rather a deep, willful repression of reminders of the War, except for when they intrude forcefully upon this supposedly "post-War" time.

Septimus commits suicide when Dr. Holmes attempts to return after he and his wife declined Dr. Holmes' services further:

There remained only the window, the large Bloomsbury-lodging house window, the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy... Holmes and Bradshaw like that sort of thing. (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings. (149)

Septimus' suicide seems to embody Caruth's reasoning of "the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). This passage implies a question of balance in those oscillating crises, mirrored by Septimus' precarious perch on the windowsill and his prolonging of the moment before he jumps. He sees beauty in many places and enjoys lots of things, except for the necessity of dealing with other people, which is made

particularly unbearable by the doctors which he is obliged to see. While likely based on Woolf's own experience with mental health professionals and satirized (Bell, Nicolson), the doctors' insistence that Septimus must simply want to be better and act normally in order to recover, as well as their myriad of other less well-intentioned techniques, proves to be too much for the already unendurable suffering Septimus suffers. His resolution to "wait till the very last moment" emphasizes the deep irony in Dr. Holmes' insistence that he see to Septimus, in that it is Holmes' unwanted presence that pushes Septimus to commit suicide.

Septimus' suicide is presented as the ultimate end of a paradoxical post-War life. Given the various paradoxes that revolved around his character as a young World War I veteran (War and peacetime, youth and death, violence and survival, life and madness, past and present, etc.), it could be expected that these paradoxes would resolve themselves after he committed suicide. However, the gossip of his death invades Clarissa Dalloway's party: "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (183). The clock is striking the hour when Clarissa steps into a side room alone to contemplate Septimus' suicide. This moment (186) ties together Septimus, Clarissa, and the old woman across the way. Septimus' status as a soldier means that, had he died during wartime, his life would have been considered given in service for his country, effectively in trade for civilians like Clarissa and the old woman. However, according to characters like Clarissa, the War is supposed to be over, and yet, for Septimus, wartime continued. Since he died during wartime, his life was given in service to his country, even though the War was over. Through his death, it is revealed that wartime truly continues for every character so long as young soldiers continue to suffer and die for the wars of their countries.

Clarissa also experiences distorted time through her frequent remembrances. Between her former illness and the unrelenting process of aging, the tragic possibility of dying young has transitioned into an inevitable question of time. However, unlike Septimus' paradoxical perception of past and present forcing his traumatic wartime experiences into the present, Clarissa's memories repress wartime, substituting her own relationship with death as a way to understand post-wartime London. Caruth argues that stories about trauma can be read as a "story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8), and Clarissa's distorted experience of time, while questionably traumatic in nature, is deeply informed by Septimus' wartime trauma. Similarly, potential universality of Septimus' paradoxical view of simultaneous past and present is juxtaposed against Clarissa's drifting between the two.

Clarissa rarely thinks about wartime. It is from free indirect discourse in her perspective that "The War was over, except..." passage is narrated, emphasizing Clarissa's own desire to move past the War. She frequently remembers peripheral details, such as the wares of a shop before or after the War or Mrs. Kilman's dismissal from a school during the War, but she does not directly remember wartime. Between her memories of her youth and her almost compulsive efforts toward planning the party, Clarissa seems to have been unaffected by the War at all. However, it is also in free indirect style that Clarissa narrates hearing a pistol in the street after a car backfires, implying that Clarissa has healed from or repressed her own experiences of wartime.

Clarissa's experience of her age is strangely doubled throughout the novel. She "felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged" (8). She is described as having become

“very white since her illness” (4). Later, she imagined seeing her parents as both a child and an old woman:

For she was a child, throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete life, which she put down by them and said, “This is what I have made of it! This!” (43)

This doubling effect juxtaposes Clarissa’s youthful memories with her aging body, emphasizing the detachment Clarissa feels from her own body. This detachment permits many of the transitions between the present and the past as sensory experiences such as sounds and smells trigger her recollections and draw her attention back to the present.

This combined yet distinct body-mind experience also highlights Clarissa’s age and previous illness as the sources of her detachment, linking the inevitable but indeterminate arrival of death to her distorted experience of time.

However, it is not her death that arrives, but Septimus’. This leads Clarissa to ponder:

Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded the; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (184)

This seems suitable to Clarissa’s experience of Septimus’ death, as she seems to see his death without ever having even known him. Time ties together Septimus, the old woman across the way, and Clarissa (186) as Clarissa processes hearing about Septimus’ death at her party. His death, under the logic of wartime, is essentially exchanged for theirs. Therefore, Clarissa’s slowly encroaching death is delayed by the tragic death of a young soldier, and so all of her ponderings about age and death throughout the novel are informed by the loss of an entire generation, fundamentally undermining war by calling into question the very logic which exchanges the life of a young soldier for a society such as the one at Clarissa’s party, which viewed his post-War traumatic suicide as gossip fodder.

The literary doubling of Clarissa and Septimus establishes the sharing of their trauma through the simultaneity with which their perspectives are offered to the reader. By implicitly associating their burdens, Woolf uses their figurative doubling to equate wartime trauma and the enduring trauma of the Great War which pervades society.

4. *To the Lighthouse*

With *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* establish that battlefield and non-battlefield trauma of the Great War influence society post-wartime, *To the Lighthouse* continues this pattern through its portrayal of wartime while positing a potential path to recovery.

A superficial reading of *To the Lighthouse* might suggest that the War is so thoroughly repressed as to be almost entirely absent. Except for two brief mentions, direct attention to the War is confined to the second part of the novel: Time Passes. The 18-page section describes the deterioration of the house as the years after the family leaves, with bracketed interjections about the domestic actions and deaths of multiple characters. The only direct perspective of the war is offered through brackets, though its indirect effects are demonstrated in the passage they interrupt:

But slumber and sleep though it might there came later in the summer ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt, which, with their repeated shocks still further loosened the shawl and cracked the tea-cups. Now and again some glass tinkled in the cupboard as if a giant voice had shrieked so loud in its agony that tumblers stood inside a cupboard vibrated too. Then again silence fell; and then, night after night, and sometimes in plain mid-day when the roses were bright and light turned on the wall its shape clearly there seemed to drop into this silence, this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling.

[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.] (133).
Though this portrayal of the effects of the distant noises of war upon the house lacks agents acting upon the described objects, violence is evident through the percussive “blows” and “shocks” the house undergoes which even “cracked the tea-cups.” The reference to “later in the summer,” “night after night” and “sometimes in plain mid-day” extend the sudden loud noises from rare, random events into non-specific, timeless regularity. The house is also affected by the way in which wartime changed the habits and actions of the Ramsay family, leading to the lack of interaction with the property that caused its severe decline. That even

an empty house in the Hebrides is affected by the War emphasizes the universality of the violence experienced as a result of the War. This is highlighted by the interruption of the particular explosion in which Andrew Ramsay died, though the lack of detail (“Twenty or thirty young men” “in France”) gestures once again to the universality of wartime.

Furthermore, Andrew’s death is not the first interruption of “Time Passes;” both Mrs. Ramsay and Prue have died, the parallel structure and surprising suddenness of all three deaths equating the death of a young man in war with the unexpected death of a middle-aged woman and the death of a young woman in childbirth, universalizing the trauma of Andrew’s wartime death across the boundaries of gender and social role.

However, while this cyclically universal and particular way of addressing the War is consistent with *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the largest divergence occurs in the third part of the novel, “The Lighthouse.” Rather than the focus being on Andrew Ramsay, the young soldier who died in France, much of the reminiscence is of Mrs. Ramsay. While it could be argued that, as Lily repeatedly calls out her name in a manner evocative of the times characters called for Jacob Flanders, the trauma of the war has simply been transferred to Mrs. Ramsay’s death, Prue, Mrs. Ramsay, and Andrew’s deaths are equated by their parallel treatment in Part II. This equalization leads to the Furthermore, Lily’s reflections on Mrs. Ramsay’s death emphasize the difference between transferred, unresolved trauma and resolved trauma:

But the dead, thought Lily, encountering some obstacle in her design which made her pause and ponder, stepping back a foot or so, oh, the dead! she murmured, one pitied them, one brushed them aside, one had even a little contempt for them. They are at our mercy. Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone, she thought. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas. She recedes further and further from us. Mockingly she seemed to see her there at the end of the corridor of years saying, of all incongruous things, "Marry, marry!" (sitting very upright early in the morning with the birds beginning to cheep in the garden outside). And one would

have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes. They're happy like that; I'm happy like this. Life has changed completely. At that all her being, even her beauty, became for a moment, dusty and out of date. For a moment Lily, standing there, with the sun hot on her back, summing up the Rayleys, triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay, who would never know how Paul went to coffee-houses and had a mistress; how he sat on the ground and Minta handed him his tools; how she stood here painting, had never married, not even William Bankes. (175)

This moment demonstrates that despite Lily's mourning for and missing Mrs. Ramsay, enough time has passed and Lily has learned over the years that "Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone." Despite her deep admiration for Mrs. Ramsay, Lily's desire to become one with Mrs. Ramsay (51) is developing an understanding of her own independent self, even as she emphasizes that her identity was shaped by her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay. In his essay "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," Freud argues that, in recovering from trauma, "We render the compulsion [to repeat the trauma] harmless, and indeed useful, by giving it the right to assert itself in a definite field[, ...] an intermediate region between illness and real life through which the transition from one to the other is made" (154). This is not to say that *Lily* is working through the trauma of *Andrew's* death by transferring the grieving process onto Mrs. Ramsay's death, but rather that the societal trauma of the Great War was transferred onto *every* death. No death or loss could be experienced without its context in or after wartime.

However, this transference between wartime trauma and post-wartime grieving does not exist on a field between illness and real life but between two aspects of real life, which disallows the intervention upon the transference Freud describes as necessary to recovery (154). It is therefore necessary for Lily to work through her wartime and post-War trauma through her painting. The resistance to finishing the painting which she has experienced throughout the novel has taken a new form in the shape of Mr. Ramsay, who wants something from Lily in the wake of Mrs. Ramsay's death. Before their first interaction,

Lily's thoughts are conveyed to the reader through free indirect style, repeating "[Mrs. Ramsay] was dead... She was dead... She was dead." Lily addresses the repetition directly: "But why repeat this over and over again? Why be always trying to bring up some feeling she had not got?" (150). This compulsive repetition is done away with by the end of the novel, when, in the final section of Part III, Lily does not think of Mrs. Ramsay at all, but rather finishing her painting, which cyclically returns her thoughts to Mrs. Ramsay until its completion. At the moment Mr. Ramsay's needs are no longer draining Lily when he reaches the lighthouse, Lily is able to complete the painting, allowing herself to finish the project that had so closely tied her artistic efforts to Mrs. Ramsay. By painting a final stroke on the canvas, Lily is able to resolve her grief for Mrs. Ramsay and her trauma from the War in a significant but not reiterative way.

5. *The Years*

While *To the Lighthouse* differs from *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* by portraying recovery from the trauma of wartime, *The Years* presents a portrayal of wartime informed by trauma but not defined by it. Instead, *The Years* posits that wartime trauma influences not only post-War society but also their future.

The Years is irregularly divided into everyday scenes from various years in the history of the Pargiter family, with each chapter emblazoned with its year. While occasional comments have referenced events leading up to the Great War, the characters' ignorance of the coming war is never as evident as the opening of "1914":

1914

It was a brilliant spring; the day was radiant. Even the air seemed to have a burr in it, as it touched the tree tops; it vibrated, it rippled. The leaves were sharp and green. In the country old church clocks rasped out the hour; the rusty sound went over fields that were red with clover, and up went the rooks as if flung by the bells. Round they wheeled; then settled on the tree tops.

In London all was gallant and strident; the Season was beginning; horns hooted; the traffic roared; flags flew taut as trout in a stream. And from all the spires of all the London churches—the fashionable saints of Mayfair, the dowdy saints of Kensington, the hoary saints of the city—the hour was proclaimed. The air over London seemed a rough sea of sound through which circles travelled. But the clocks were irregular, as if the saints themselves were divided. There were pauses, silences... Then the clocks struck again. (224)

The "brilliant spring" and "radiant" day emphasize that the War has yet to begin. The pageantry with which London is going about its business is intended to juxtapose itself against the reader's memory or imagination of London during the War. The irregularity of the clocks is symbolic of an irregularity on a larger scale: the irregularity between the lively spring day in the novel and the reader's awareness that War is just around the corner, which is immediately called to mind by the large section heading of "1914." As Paul Fussell writes in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, "Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so

melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends” (7). The continuing passage in *The Years* highlights this irony, as Martin cheerily goes about his day, window shopping and enjoying the high spirits on the streets of London: “Everybody seemed lighthearted and irresponsible, sallying out of their houses, flaunting along the streets with pennies for the organ grinders and pennies for the beggars. Everybody seemed to have money to spend” (225). The excess money and luxury goods, the lightheartedness and joviality, and the careless recreation in the street are all about to be lost during wartime.

The 1914 section concludes with Kitty walking through the grounds of her husband’s country estate:

Spring was sad always, she thought; it brought back memories. All passes, all changes, she thought, as she climbed up the little path between the trees. Nothing of this belonged to her; her son would inherit; his wife would walk here after her. [...] She threw herself on the ground, and looked over the billowing land that went rising and falling, away and away, until somewhere far off it reached the sea. Uncultivated, uninhabited, existing by itself, for itself, without towns or houses it looked from this height. Dark wedges of shadow, bright breadths of light lay side by side. Then, as she watched, light moved and dark moved; light and shadow went travelling over the hills and over the valleys. A deep murmur sang in her ears—the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone. She lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased. (277-278)

The emphasis on “spring” and seasons is mirrored by the cyclicity of inheritance. Kitty, like all women of the time, is unable to own property, and so is seemingly excluded from the cycle. It is her lack of ownership of the land that causes her to consider the land’s inheritor: her son. The gendered nature of this inheritance is emphasized through the mention of her son’s future wife, who would hold the same position Kitty now holds. However, this line of inheritance is ironically troubled by the looming war, which will kill many young men, thereby disrupting the cycle of inheritance. The land itself is unaffected by its status as property, “uncultivated, uninhabited, existing by itself,” even as seasons, weather, and light change its appearance. The simultaneity of the changing appearance and ownership of the

land and its enduring existence conflicts with the reader's foreknowledge of the War, leading to the effect that "time had ceased." This passage accentuates the connection between temporality and inheritance as the 1914 section concludes.

Most of the War is not directly mentioned in the novel. The most direct representation occurs in "1917," when an air raid interrupts the dinner party. While everyone displays practiced indifference, a curious effect influences their conversation: they cannot seem to maintain a consistent thread of discussion.

It seemed to [Eleanor] that they had been saying something extremely interesting; but she could not remember what. They sat silent for a moment.

[...]

"And what were we talking about before the raid?" Eleanor asked. Again she felt that they had been in the middle of saying something very interesting when they were interrupted. But there had been a complete break; none of them could remember what they had been saying. (289, 292)

This "complete break" and loss of time that Eleanor thinks of demonstrates the active repression of the traumatic incident they just experienced. When Renny makes a comment about others dying in the raid, Eleanor thinks "But you must let us think of something else" while Nicholas mutters "'Only children letting off fireworks in the back garden'" (293). The avoidance of the subject as well as the offer of an alternative explanation for the noise despite their knowledge of its true source display the way in which the characters are repressing the trauma during the War. By focusing on this moment, Woolf displays the effect of War on a group of civilians who would otherwise be assumed to be untraumatized by wartime.

The end of the War is also represented in *The Years* as Crosby is attending to errands for the family she now serves.

"Them guns again," Crosby muttered, looking up at the pale-grey sky with peevish irritation. The rooks, scared by the gun-fire, rose and wheeled round the tree-tops. Then there was another dull boom. A man on a ladder who was painting the windows of one of the houses paused with his brush in his hand and looked round. A woman who was walking along carrying a loaf of bread that stuck half out of its paper

wrapping stopped too. They both waited as if for something to happen. A topple of smoke drifted over and flopped down from the chimneys. The guns boomed again. The man on the ladder said something to the woman on the pavement. She nodded her head. Then he dipped his brush in the pot and went on painting. The woman walked on. Crosby pulled herself together and tottered across the road into the High Street. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed. The war was over—so somebody told her as she took her place at the counter of the grocer's shop. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed. (304-305)

This scene epitomizes one of the recurring concepts of *The Years*: the amalgamation of the everyday, usually domestic, with large-scale history. By choosing to center this moment around Crosby, Woolf highlights the way in which the lives of the working class were and were not affected by the war. Crosby has no options economically but to continue to work, regardless of war or illness. However, Crosby's seeming nonchalance of muttering "“Them guns again”" is matched by the painter and the woman walking down the street, who, besides briefly pausing and presumably confirming with each other the meaning of the guns and sirens, continue about their business. Crosby also continues onward and is told by somebody "“at the counter of the grocer's shop.”" The continuity of everyday business such as menial labor is juxtaposed with the demarcation in history that is the end of the War. Furthermore, the tools of warfare are used to announce its end, and the repetition of gun-fire and sirens symbolically represents the continuing effects of wartime into post-war time.

By setting the final section in the "Present Day," Woolf is unrestricted by history, except as a general period after the War. Without the markers of a particular historical moment, Woolf is able to illustrate the ongoing effects of the War on the Pargiter family. Despite the happy circumstances of the reunion, a curious effect continues to occur: constant interruption. Many attempts that characters make to speak to each other or to make speeches to the attendees at large are disrupted:

Kitty turned to Nicholas.

“And what was your speech going to have been about, Mr. ... I’m afraid I don’t know your name?” she said. “... the one that was interrupted?”

“My speech?” he laughed. “It was to have been a miracle!” he said. “A masterpiece! But how can one speak when one is always interrupted? I begin: I say, Let us give thanks. Then Delia says, Don’t thank me. I begin again: I say, Let us give thanks to someone, to somebody... And Renny says, What for? I begin again, and look—Eleanor is sound asleep.” (He pointed at her.) “So what’s the good?”

“Oh, but there is some good—” Kitty began.

She still wanted something—some finish, some fillip—what, she did not know.

And it was getting late. She must go. (425)

Kitty’s desire for “some finish, some fillip” are not unlike many readers’ desire for resolution at the end of the novel, which is continually frustrated by the disruption and disappointment of this section. The incessant interruptions temporally represent the problem of continuity which the Pargiters face. Furthermore, Eleanor, North, Sara, Peggy, Delia, and Edward are all apparently childless, suggesting that none of the Pargiters have had children since the War, which further enforces the idea that the family has been interrupted by the War. While historical time continues, the Pargiters are somehow unable to keep up. While the War is mentioned more frequently in *The Years* than in Woolf’s earlier novels, the apparent recovery from wartime trauma does not mean that the Pargiter family is unaffected. Though each member of the family shows few signs of wartime trauma, the family as a unit has been irrevocably marked by the War’s interruption of their lifetimes.

By utilizing irony to emphasize the losses of wartime, representing the development of trauma among civilians in the heart of London, and superimposing the continuous domestic on the particular historical in *The Years*, Woolf demonstrates once more that trauma is not necessarily related to battlefield experiences, particularly with wars that extend the battlefield to families in their homes in London. By moving wartime trauma into a family saga, Woolf makes clear that post-war trauma threatens the future of each family, and

through each family, society at large. Therefore, the trauma of the Great War is not just a problem for the society immediately after the War, but also a problem of their future.

6. Conclusion

Throughout Virginia Woolf's novels, the Great War is a traumatic, ineffable event that deeply impacts not just the characters but also the narrative. In *Jacob's Room*, Jacob Flanders demonstrated the societal trauma of the unknowable trauma of losing an entire generation. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus' paradoxical perception of past simultaneous with the present lead to a continuing state of wartime, while Clarissa's disrupted sense of temporality is distorted by age, illness, memory, and a societal insistence that the War is over. When Septimus committed suicide, he gave his life for his service to his country; by the logic of wartime, Clarissa benefitted from his death, even though his death served as nothing more than gossip intruding on her party. In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily recovers from wartime trauma by transferring her wartime trauma and grief over Mrs. Ramsay's death into her painting, which she resolves by finishing. In *The Years*, the representation of trauma in London families, the use of irony, and the overlap of continuous domestic on particular historical accentuates that the problem of wartime trauma will always coexist with war. Everyone in society is affected by the losses of war. The trauma of wartime continues long after war ends. Recovery is possible, but trauma is ultimately a question of futurity. Therefore, Woolf's portrayal of wartime trauma is a fundamentally pacifist project, a project which is continued in the essay "Three Guineas," which Woolf wrote concurrently with *The Years*.

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